

## NOVEL

ウルトラ  
怪獣  
擬人化  
計画

設定・原案・シリーズ構成: 海法紀光

執筆: 谷魯央佳(ミームミーム) イラスト: ハルガ

原作・監修: 内谷プロダクション

ガーリッシュ  
ナンバー

著: 海 紀

キャラクター原案・カラーラスト: QP:flapper

モノクロイラスト: やむ茶

乃木若葉は  
勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成: タカヒロ(みなとそふと)

執筆: 朱白あおい

イラスト: BUNBUN

監修: Project 2H

MASSA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MASSA-SAMA

**CENSORED**



Hero Record

# 第十四話

茨道

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Supervision by Project 2H



企画原案・シリーズ構成／

タカヒロ (みなどそふと)

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バーテックスデザイン／D.K.&JWWORKS

監修／Project 2H



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Wakaba was at a loss for how to deal with the scorpion-type Vertex. Even with the power of the fairy Yoshitsune, she could not damage the scorpion-type Vertex in the slightest.

Chikage had been attacking the Vertex several times at once through the power of Shichinin Misaki, but again, to no avail.

Unable to even clear her mind of her regrets over Tamako and Anzu, Wakaba despaired at her powerlessness.

"!?"

Suddenly, Wakaba sensed an anomaly in the Jukai.

Part of the Jukai's vegetation began to change color, as if rotting away. The decay was spreading forth from the scorpion-type Vertex's path and the places its attacks had damaged the vegetation.

(... Is it corroding into the Jukai...!?)

Once Forestization subsides, any Vertex damage done to the Jukai causes feedback to the real world in the form of disasters and accidents in Shikoku-- That was what the Taisha had told the girls. In all of the battles so far, the Jukai had not been damaged significantly to the point where Shikoku had suffered any harm. But now, this corrosion on the other hand...

Just then, a roar resounded throughout the Forestized Marugame City.

"Waaaaaaahhhh!!"

When Wakaba turned around to look, there stood Yuuna, shouting over the dead bodies of Tamako and Anzu.

"Come-- Shuten-Doji!!"

Yuuna had called off the power of Ichimokuren to imbue her body with the power of a new fairy.

A power far beyond the human body and therefore forbidden.

The power of a demon king.

Yuuna's hero garments transformed. Her weapons strengthened. Those tekko gloves grew an absurd enormity unfitting of such a small girl. They seemed warped, even.

"Rrroooohhh!!"

Yuuna kicked off the ground, leaping toward the scorpion-type Vertex.

As shown by the enormity of those tekko gloves, Shuten-Doji's power was specialized for destructive force.

Yuuna punched the scorpion-type Vertex in the face.

"Rrroohhhhh!!"

Or rather, the giant Vertex's front side, which was reminiscent of an expressionless human face. She shattered it in one blow.

The sight of Yuuna with the power of a new fairy was a shock to Wakaba.

In a matter of mere moments, Yuuna had destroyed a part of the nigh-invulnerable scorpion-type Vertex.

(What power...)

It truly was unimaginable power.

That-- truly was a trump card among trump cards, and the Taisha was right to classify it as dangerous.

A power born out of the reckless desire for power, with a complete disregard for its burden to the body.

After she had smashed its front face, Yuuna's second strike tore into the scorpion-type Vertex's liquid-filled abdomen. Her third strike shattered the tail. The giant Vertex's crumbling body became hollow inside.

(But Yuuna... just how severe will the kickback be for using such unbridled power...!?)

The heroes' physical abilities were indeed strengthened, but even with that amplification in consideration, Yuuna was clearly going overboard with the power she was using.

"Uwwaaaaahhhh!!"

Yuuna kept screaming as she destroyed the scorpion-type Vertex.

She cried and screamed her lungs out.

Yuuna's attacks robbed the giant Vertex's body of its form, causing its constituent common Vertexes to defuse and disperse.

But each of those common Vertexes was equally guilty of Tamako and Anzu's deaths. Yuuna's fists would not stop until every last common Vertex was annihilated.

"Yuuna! That's enough! No more! Think about your body! Leave the rest to me!!"

But Wakaba's cries fell on deaf ears as Yuuna's fists kept pounding...

And finally--

The giant Vertex was destroyed by Yuuna's overwhelming power, and the remaining common Vertexes were swept up by the three heroes.

With the battle over, Forestization cleared away, returning Shikoku to its original scenery.



The citizens were unaware that the battle had occurred. The same daily events from before the Vertex invasion continued uninterrupted.

But two heroes had been lost.

After the battle had finished, Wakaba and the others went to a Taisha-connected hospital for a thorough examination. Wakaba and Chikage were discharged at night, but Yuuna had to stay hospitalized.

After sweeping way the Vertexes, Yuuna had lost consciousness and even now had yet to recover. It was perhaps the kickback from imbuing herself with Shuten-Doji, but neither Wakaba nor Chikage could get the Taisha to tell them anything about Yuuna's condition. All they were told was that she was not in mortal danger.

After returning from the hospital, Wakaba and Chikage went to their own rooms without exchanging a word. Chikage hid her face and fell silent, rejecting any attempts at conversation through her demeanor and Wakaba wanted to be alone for now herself.

Wakaba blankly watched as the news played on TV in her room.

(I knew casualties were always a possibility. And I thought I was ready to face that, but...)

Regret, indignation, and helplessness filled Wakaba's mind. But perhaps of the overwhelming shock, no tears seemed to flow. All she could think about was why she couldn't save Tamako and Anzu. There had to have been a way.

The TV was still on. A newscaster was reporting on a tornado that had formed in Marugame City, tearing down buildings and causing deaths and injuries.

The tornado was an effect of the Vertex damage and corrosion to the Jukai. The giant Vertex from the last battle had the power to infiltrate the divine protection and corrode the Jukai. That was the Taisha's guess.

(... There were civilian casualties too...)

Two heroes had lost their lives.

They could not protect the people of Shikoku.

Though the Vertexes had been annihilated, the battle was far from a victory.

Wakaba bit her lip.

So hard that it bled.

Chikage locked herself up alone in her room.

She took the fetal position on her bed and trembled.

The two heroes, Tamako and Anzu, had been killed.

"Ugh, uuuuugh.... What the hell...! What the hell was that monster...!?"

It was in a class far outstripping those of the Vertexes they had previously fought. Had Yuuna not used the power of Shuten-Doji, the heroes would have faced certain annihilation.

Previously, some among the Taisha had theorized that Vertex fusion and evolution was not the product of chaos, but that of deliberate design to reach some desired form.

The unique Vertex that appeared in this attack... was truly the apex of Vertex evolution. And thus the Taisha had concluded that this was perhaps the Vertex's perfect form.

However-- there was an even worse possibility.

The giant Vertex that Yuuna defeated was hollow inside. In other words, perhaps the so-called perfect Vertex was still incomplete.

Perhaps the true perfect form was even stronger than what Yuuna had defeated this time.

(If such a thing were to show up... then we're all...)

Dead. Like Tamako and Anzu.

"No... Please, no...!"

I'm scared.

I don't want to die.

The fear Chikage felt from her first battle against the Vertexes rose back up from the depths of her brain.

The sight of Tamako and Anzu's tragic deaths flashed before her eyes.

Her sight grew dark.

She rushed to the bathroom out of nausea.

But since she hadn't eaten anything, there was nothing in her stomach to empty.

As she kept vomiting over the toilet, tears streamed from her eyes.

"Ugh, uuuughhh... why did this have to...! Uggghh....!"



Hinata was told about what had happened during the Vertex battle. The largest, strongest Vertex ever seen. The corrosion of the Jukai. Yuuna's use of Shuten-Doji's power. And finally--the deaths of Doi Tamako and Iwojima Anzu.

The remains of the two heroes were being safeguarded in Marugame Castle until the funeral service.

Hinata reverently wiped the bodies of Tamako and Anzu with a damp cloth. Such was part of the purification ceremony for the deceased.

Wiping the bloodstained bodies of her friends was a harsh task for a girl her age. But Hinata volunteered to take on this role herself.

(This... is all I can do for them.)

Now that heroes had fallen, Hinata was painfully aware of the difference in standpoint between a hero and a miko. When she were by the heroes' side, she could not save them. She could only wait in a safe place. Her heart wrenched in guilt.

(So at least-- at least let me cleanse their bodies with my own hands...)

Wakaba and Chikage had locked themselves in their rooms ever since the hospital examination. There was nothing she could do about that.

Just standing in the presence of her two friends' remains was enough to make Hinata's feet unsteady with sorrow. She could not even begin to imagine the shock Wakaba and Chikage felt to see them get killed in person. The heroes were the guardians of Shikoku and held power far transcending that of ordinary humans, but Chikage and Wakaba were still just girls in middle school regardless.

After a long time had passed and Hinata had finished cleansing the two heroes' remains, she headed towards their rooms. To sort through the belongings of the deceased. She thought that perhaps she could find some sort of memento to give to Aki Masuzu, a miko that the two were friends with.

In Tamako's room, Hinata found several outdoor goods that she could not even begin to imagine how to use. As she went through each one, Hinata cried. It felt as if there were a piece of Tamako imbued within each of the things in this room, making it difficult for Hinata to sort through.

In the end, she couldn't choose anything to give to Aki, so she left Tamako's room and headed to Anzu's.

Anzu's room was the same. The sight of the bookshelves packed with books brought Hinata to tears once again. Each of those books was proof that Anzu had been alive just a short while ago.



The next day, Anzu and Tamako's funeral ceremony was quietly held with just miko and Taisha officials attending.

The Taisha had still not decided whether or not to reveal to the Shikoku public that the two heroes had been killed in action. After all, the Taisha had already resorted to distorting the information of the Honshu expedition in order to give the people hope. If they were to now announce the loss of two heroes and the appearance of a hero-resistant enemy, the public could once again lose hope. There were far too many people who relied on the heroes as a source of emotional support.

And thus, the Taisha wished to keep the two deaths and the giant Vertex a secret. But the previous heavy media coverage of the heroes was now backfiring on them. They couldn't possibly keep Tamako and Anzu's deaths secret forever. And thus, the Taisha was having a hard time figuring out how to time the announcements.

The caskets housing the two heroes' remains were covered with white cloth and the funeral visitors went up to pay their respects.

Wakaba and Chikage were in a daze, their faces as blank as if all they saw was a film lacking any realism. Hinata hid her grief-stricken face the entire time.

But missing among all the funeral visitors was one conspicuous absentee: Yuuna. She was still unable to go leave the special therapy room.

One miko broke down crying as she was paying her respects.

Aki Masuzu.

"Idiots... Why... did you have to die..."

Aki always had Tamako and Anzu on her mind, but the Taisha had afforded her next to no opportunities to meet with them due to her duties as a miko. And now that she had finally gotten to see them again, neither Tamako nor Anzu could talk to her, or move, ever again.

"If I knew this would happen... I should've spent more time with them, even if I had to force my way there... I should've never left them..."

Hinata kept her head down, unable to find any words to comfort Aki.

"... I should've stayed... by the heroes' side..."

The funeral service continued monotonously without any regard to Aki's tear-soaked face.



Afterwards, a Senreisai and Sojosai were performed, but Wakaba was still unable to feel any sense of reality and just let the time tick in a daze until eventually, the funeral service came to a close.

Days passed.

School resumed, but only Wakaba and Hinata came to class. Yuuna was still in the hospital and Chikage kept calling in sick.

"It's kind of lonely here..."

Hinata murmured.

"Yeah, I guess..."

Wakaba's voice lacked its usual sense of ambition.

Out of six desks, only two were occupied.

"... But it looks like Yuuna-san will be discharged soon. And once that happens, I'm sure Chikage-san will start coming to school again."

Hinata strained to speak cheerfully.

Wakaba gazed outside the window.

The countless sakura trees around the Marugame Castle grounds were blooming with so many flowers they looked like they were on fire. The sakura in full bloom [TL: mankai] would probably fall by the end of the week.

--Okay, then once our next Vertex battle's over, let's go flower viewing to celebrate!!

--Hopefully we can go flower viewing soon...

Tamako and Anzu's words played back in the back of Wakaba's head.

"We couldn't go flower viewing..."

The wind swept up sakura petals and scattered them incessantly onto the ground.

After the funeral service, Chikage kept inside her room at all essentially all times, only going outside when it was absolutely necessary. She only ate instant foods and snacks she had stockpiled.

Worried about her behavior, the Taisha sent her an email saying "You may have acquired PTSD from your last battle, so please come in for some counseling." Chikage ignored it.

(What the hell... could a counselor even understand...?)

Fighting is frightening.

But a hero that doesn't fight is worthless.

Chikage doesn't want to be worthless like she was in the past, so she has to fight.

But--

In the back of her mind is the sight of Tamako and Anzu's cruel deaths.

(... I hate being worthless... but I'm afraid of fighting...)

Chikage lay face down on the bed and thought repetitive thoughts to no avail.

She didn't want to see anyone now. She didn't feel like talking.

"... But... if it were Takashima-san..."

She thought she didn't want to talk with anyone, but she did in fact want to talk with Yuuna.

Yuuna's existence was Chikage's final pillar of psychological support.

By now, Yuuna had been transferred from the special therapy room to the regular hospital ward, so visitors were no longer prohibited.

Chikage got up from bed, changed out of her pajamas, and left her room. The sun was already setting, but since she had gone several days without sunlight, her eyes still hurt a little.

Chikage went to the hospital, asked for Yuuna's room at reception, and headed that way. Along the way, she caught sight of some people talking. These people appeared to be family of victims from the tornado that happened as a result of the Vertex attack.

... How unfortunate... well, he did manage to survive the 7/30 disaster a few years back... I guess there's nothing you can do about natural disasters...



They were speaking about such things in a sorrowful tone.

Those people were unaware that the tornado was an effect of the Vertex attack. It was no natural disaster-- and if giant Vertexes like that one keep attacking, then the same thing will probably keep happening.

When Chikage reached Yuuna's room and opened the door, she found her gazing outside the window absentmindedly. When she noticed Chikage enter, Yuuna put on a bright smile.

"Gun-chan! You came!"

"Yeah... Takashima-san... is your body okay...?"

"Well, besides my arms, it's a perfect recovery already!"

As she spoke, Yuuna showed off her still-bandaged arms. Yuuna's fighting style means that although she wears tekko gloves, she still strikes the enemy with her fists, which probably causes quite the recoil in her arms. Her hand injuries looked painful, but she had no other obvious injuries.

"What about you, Gun-chan, you okay?"

"Mm..."

"Well, you look kind of pale, so..."

Yuuna looked at Chikage with a worried look on her face.

"A lot happened..."

Chikage averted her eyes from Yuuna as she answered.

The emergence of an overly powerful enemy. Anzu and Tamako's funeral service. Chikage's nights spent in fear...

Chikage's spirit was full of cracks and was on the verge of collapse.

"I... I just don't know what to do anymore..."

Chikage's voice wavered as she did her best to hold back the tears.

"Gun-chan, come here."

The quivering Chikage drew near as told and Yuuna gently embraced her.

"It's okay, Gun-chan. There's no need to be afraid. ... No matter what happens, I'll protect you. I won't let anyone else get hurt again."

"..."

Chikage felt a strong will behind Yuuna's words. Within the embrace of Yuuna's arms, Chikage could feel her fear slowly fade away.

The previous battle should've been a big shock for Yuuna too. She saw Anzu and Tamako die before her eyes, and she herself got heavily injured and was hospitalized--

And yet she was worried more about Chikage than herself.

Chikage was brought to the verge of tears.

(... I'm a hero too... And I'm older, so...)

--I have to get my act together.

Chikage held back her tears and looked up.

"I'm... okay now..."

Chikage spoke in a small, but resolute voice.

Starting the next day, three students were coming to the Marugame Castle classroom.

There hadn't been any Vertex attacks in a while, so on the surface, the days were peaceful.

Before long, the sakura petals had all fallen.

Eventually May came along and Yuuna was discharged and returned to school.

And when the time came for Yuuna's hand bandages to be removed, the Taisha passed along a task to the heroes:

Take down an evolved Vertex forming over the Seto Inland Sea.

Now, Wakaba, Yuuna, and Chikage transformed into their hero forms and stood atop of the Seto Ohashi Bridge.

"This is kind of an unusual task, huh? Usually we only defeat the enemies that enter Shikoku." Yuuna said dubiously.

"True. Maybe the Taisha's plan changed..."

Wakaba didn't understand the real intention either.



They were told that the evolved Vertex was forming outside the wall close to the Seto Ohashi Bridge.

But as far as they could see from atop the bridge, there was no enemy in sight. If it were as big as the scorpion-type Vertex that appeared last time, they would've been able to see it from across the wall already. Which meant that perhaps this Vertex wasn't as giant as the last one.

In that case, why would the Taisha abruptly change the plan and order a takedown of a Vertex that wasn't even coming into the barrier--

Wakaba turned her head.

Overcome with a strange feeling, Wakaba and the others advanced down the Seto Ohashi Bridge and across the wall to the outside.

"--!?"

That very moment, a bizarre sight entered Wakaba's vision.

Right outside the wall-- over the ocean, right by the Seto Ohashi Bridge, was a giant Vertex even bigger than the scorpion-type. Perhaps it wasn't complete just yet. Common Vertices were gathering and fusing to it one after the other.

Wakaba's surprise was twofold. First at how such a large Vertex was being formed. Second at how they couldn't even see that Vertex until they had gotten that close to it.

A Vertex that huge should've been visible from inside the wall.

Wakaba suddenly got the idea to backtrack the Seto Ohashi Bridge back inside the wall.

Once inside, she looked towards the outside and, as she thought, the conspicuously huge Vertex was conspicuously invisible.

Yuuna and Chikage followed suit and noticed the anomaly.

Wakaba furrowed her eyebrows.

"Is it hiding...?"

Perhaps this was another effect of the barrier. Those inside the barrier couldn't see any anything strange happening outside, allowing people to see things inside the barrier as if everything were still normal and peaceful.

If the citizens of Shikoku could see the giant Vertex outside the barrier, they probably would be unable to continue life as usual. After all, the Vertices are the cause of the psychological uranophobia syndrome. So with that considered, perhaps this was one way the Shinju was protecting the people but regardless--

The list of things hidden to the public just kept growing.





"... Let's forget about the barrier for now... and focus on killing that Vertex..."

Once Chikage said that, Wakaba finally remembered their original task.

There was nothing the three could do about the barrier either way. So what they needed to focus on now was to deal with that giant Vertex.

The three heroes went outside the wall once again and looked at the forming giant Vertex. Even though it was still incomplete, it was bigger than the scorpion-type Vertex that caused them so much despair. If the Vertex were to complete its perfect form and invade Shikoku--

Could the heroes stop it?

No, could they even defeat it at this stage?

The heroes' attacks were essentially ineffective against the scorpion-type Vertex.

(But... we have no choice but to try!)

Wakaba used a trump card without hesitation. She imbued her body with the fairy Yoshitsune and her hero garment transformed.

Chikage likewise imbued herself with Shichinin Misaki and appeared at seven places at once.

Yuuna was about to use a trump card as well, but Wakaba stopped her.

"Wait! It's too dangerous for you to use a trump card, Yuuna. Leave it to us."

Yuuna's external wounds had already healed, and she appeared uninjured at a glance. However, there was the possibility of internal effects that not even the doctors could explain. And for that reason, the Taisha strictly forbade Yuuna from using trump cards. Not just Shuten-Doji, but Ichimokuren as well. They had no idea what might happen if she did use one.

"But..."

Wakaba's words left Yuuna at a loss, but Chikage sided with Wakaba.

"Nogi-san's right... Takashima-san, wait here..."

Chikage recalled the painful sight of Yuuna's arms when she was in the hospital. Maybe Yuuna had forced her way to leave the hospital and participate in the battle-- Chikage considered that possibility. It seemed plausible considering Yuuna's disposition.

"... Okay, gotcha."

Her teammates' adamant pleas convinced Yuuna to step down.

Wakaba and the Seven Chikages then leaped from the Seto Ohashi Bridge towards the giant Vertex.



"Haaaaaaaaahhh!!"

Her physical ability amplified with the fairy's power, Wakaba swung her drawn sword at the Vertex several times her size.

The sight of the deceased Tamako and Anzu rose up from the back of her head.

She had to protect Shikoku from this Vertex or their deaths would have been for nothing.

But the sharp brandishing of her sword was unable to even scratch the giant enemy's body.

(Not that I wasn't expecting that...!)

This kind of Vertex truly did have an absurd amount of stamina.

Wakaba jumped off of nearby common Vertexes one by one using Hasso Tobi, increasing the speed of her jumps. If she went in for the strike at a higher speed, her attack would have increased force. Once Wakaba reached a speed imperceptible to the human eye, she used her momentum to rain hundreds of slashes everywhere upon the giant Vertex's body.

However--

(Still not effective...!!)

The most she could do was scratch it.

The Seven Chikages tried attacking with seven scythes simultaneously as well, but just like with the scorpion-type Vertex, there seemed to be no effect.

The other common Vertexes seemed to realize that the giant Vertex's stamina was too much for the heroes as well-- most of the small fry ignored the heroes and only a few attacked them. Instead, the common Vertexes would fuse with the giant Vertex, prioritizing the completion of the perfect form.

Wakaba kicked away the occasional attacking common Vertex as she continued to rain down slashes upon the giant one. She knew it was ineffective, but there was no other way.

Several minutes after the heroes had begun attacking, the giant Vertex finally began moving and changed its position.

"--!?"

Instinctively detecting danger, Wakaba distanced herself from the giant Vertex. Not a moment later, a tremendous fireball shot out of the Vertex aimed right at where Wakaba used to be.

The Seven Chikages were midair in the process of launching an attack at the giant Vertex and were unable to dodge in time. Six of the seven were engulfed in the fireball and vanished.

The fireball crossed the Seto Inland Sea and made landfall onto Honshu. The intense roar and shock wave reached back to the heroes.



Wakaba and Chikage landed on the Seto Ohashi Bridge, dumbfounded.

That attack happened to be aimed at the mainland, but if that same attack were to reach the Shinju--  
(We'd have no way to defend it...)

The heroes were in shock at that realization.

And that wasn't even the enemy's final form. If the fusion continued to completion... there would be nothing in the future but despair.

"... Wakaba-chan. Gun-chan. I really should use Shuten-Doji."

Yuuna spoke with a resolute voice.

"Yuuna!"

"Takashima-san...!"

Without paying heed to Wakaba or Chikage, Yuuna closed her eyes and concentrated on her inner body. "I swear I'll protect everyone in Shikoku... I won't let our world come to an end... I won't let Tama-chan and An-chan's sacrifices end in vain...!"

Wakaba gasped. By merely standing there, she could sense the intimidating presence of a demon king.

"Ugh, uuaaggghh...!"

But Yuuna's face twisted in agony. The smooth transformation that normally came with using a trump card was nowhere to be seen.

"Wait, Yuuna! Your body really can't take it..."

"No... it can!!!"

Her fairy-aided transformation still incomplete, Yuuna leaped from the Seto Ohashi Bridge towards the giant Vertex.

She clenched her fist as she made her approach.

As if they too had felt the threat of Yuuna's presence, the common Vertexes began to attack Yuuna to defend the giant Vertex. But Yuuna's cannonball-like fist instantly shattered them into oblivion.

Yuuna was still not completely imbued with the fairy. And yet she already commanded such strength.

Shuten-Doji truly was head and shoulders above the other fairies in terms of power.

However-- that also meant that the kickback would be tremendous as well.

"HERO... PUUUUUUNCH!!"

Yuuna's fist smashed into the giant Vertex-- or at least it should have.

But before the attack could connect, huge volumes of blood spewed from Yuuna's mouth.

"Agh, ggh...!"

Not even Yuuna's body was perfect, after all.

Yuuna collapsed midair and fell into the sea.

"Yuunaaaaaaaa!!"

"Takashima-saaaaaaaaan!!"

Wakaba and Chikage's cries of Yuuna's name echoed across the Seto Inland Sea.

After rescuing Yuuna from the sea, Wakaba and Chikage retreated back into the barrier. Yuuna's condition appeared to be caused by the flesh reaching the limits of tolerance to fairy power. She was quickly readmitted to the hospital.

Wakaba and Chikage were unable to do any damage to the giant Vertex, and Yuuna, the only one with any means of effective attack was out of commission.

At their current state, there was no way for them to defeat the giant Vertex outside the barrier. Since it was prioritizing the formation of its body and showed no signs of invading Shikoku, the Taisha decided to set up some sort of countermeasure before the enemy completed its perfect form.

(If Anzu were alive... she might've been able to come up with some sort of strategy...)

Frustration and grief surged from within Wakaba.

She saw no possible way they could break out of this deadlock.

That night, Chikage piled up old magazine and newspaper articles about the heroes on her desk. Her pillar of support, Yuuna, was hospitalized again, and she couldn't visit her. The only moral support Chikage had to rely on now was the fact that "I am a hero". That is, the voices of those who recognized her worth as a hero.

The newspaper and magazine articles published so far had tons of praise for the heroes. Many of the articles focused on Wakaba, but Chikage naturally was praised as a hero herself.

Those words of praise just barely managed to support Chikage's collapsing mental state. They were sort of like a drug to her.

Chikage booted up her laptop to search for more articles praising the heroes on the net. The heroes were like idols to the people of Shikoku. There should be plenty of voices praising them online.



She browsed through Social Networking Sites and anonymous bulletin boards and--

"... huh...?"

There were voices praising the heroes, but there were also voices of a completely different sort.

'The Taisha hadn't made an official announcement of the heroes' defeat, but some people were already gossiping about it.'

'Apparently a new type of monster has appeared and they can't do shit about it. I heard some heroes have been killed already.'

'Doi Tamako and Iwojima Anzu are the ones that died.'

'Don't fall for the fed and Taisha's lies!'

'The heroes lost? For real? What a bunch of useless brats.'

'Remember that big-ass tornado? That newtype monster caused it.'

'Not entirely sure how this shit works, but since the heroes failed to defeat the monster, it caused the tornado.'

'Why the hell won't they tell us normal people anything!?'

'You haven't protected us for shit, heroes.'

'Guess it's our fault for getting our hopes up.'

'Told you guys the heroes were useless.'

'They were hyped up for nothing.'

'Useless.'

As she read the words peeking out from the depths of the internet, Chikage's hands shook.

"Why... just... why..."

She put her life on the line to protect the people of Shikoku.

And yet--

"..."

Within Chikage's eyes ignited the dark light of hatred.

(Chapter 14 END)